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271950Z Jan 06

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000122

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY  
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER  
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS  
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD  
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ  
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/26/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KHLS](#) [PINR](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: OIL WORKER HOSTAGE UPDATE SITREP #17

REF: A. LAGOS 102 AND PREVIOUS

- [1](#)B. LAGOS 101
- [1](#)C. LAGOS 90
- [1](#)D. ABUJA 120

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)1. (C) The Bayelsa State Secretary of Government (SSG), Dr. Igali, informed us that the kidnappers have agreed to release the hostages to him at a location he would not disclose. Both the Bayelsa SSG and Ecodrill Country Manager Peter Quiatkowski's intermediaries said the hostages are in good health and have access to a local doctor. We have temporarily suspended the use of Quiatkowski's intermediaries to contact the hostage-takers for the time being. Mission is finalizing hostage repatriation contingency plans while, in case Dr. Igali is not successful, also developing a plan of action to pursue leads and to utilize whatever appropriate leverage we can bring to bear to usher this situation to a safe, nonviolent resolution. End summary.

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HOSTAGE WELFARE UPDATE:  
BREAKING NEWS OF POSSIBLE RESOLUTION  
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[1](#)2. (C) In a late afternoon meeting with Conoff, Bayelsa SSG was exceptionally optimistic the hostages would be freed soon. During the discussion, three people identifying themselves as affiliated with the kidnappers visited the SSG, telling him they would call around midnight to arrange pick-up. (Note: Conoff was given the impression that the three people were somehow linked with the committee of five "go-betweens"/negotiators currently dealing with the Bayelsa government. End note.)

[1](#)3. (C) Conoff heard the SSG make arrangements for several vehicles to be ready to pick-up the hostages. The SSG said the plan was to return with the hostages to government house in Yenagoa at which time the hostages would be handed over to Shell company officials.

[1](#)4. (C) The SSG agreed to inform us as soon as he secured custody of the hostages. He was fairly certain the release point would be around Kaiama, but the three captors did not confirm this.

[1](#)5. (C) While intimating some sort of agreement had been reached for freeing the hostages, the SSG did not disclose the terms of said agreement.

[1](#)6. (C) The SSG confirmed former Bayelsa Assembly Speaker Boye Debekeme was arrested for being an accomplice to Abel Ebifemowei, the former governor's transportation officer, whom the Nigerians suspect of being the architect of the kidnapping. The SSG was impatient to hear USG action on Ebifemowei, and said Emmanuel Akomaye, Abuja chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), was awaiting a call from us regarding a warrant.

[1](#)7. (C) The SSG said he would not be accompanied by any reporters or military to the prospective hostage release point. He will be the only senior official present.

[1](#)9. (C) We are in contact with Shell and the British for preliminary medical check-ups and onward air transportation of the hostages to Lagos (via Warri) should the quartet be released. The SSG has so far made it seem as if the hostages would be free to leave the country once released.

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THURSDAY EVENING...CONTINUED ASSURANCES

OF WELL-BEING AND IMMINENT RELEASE

10. (C) Yesterday, SSG allowed Conoff to listen to a conference call with Hendricks Opukeme, one of the group of five Bayelsa negotiators. Opukeme said he and Kennedy Onibebe, another negotiator, had seen the kidnappers on Wednesday, and were told that an unidentified local doctor had examined the hostages. Opukeme also said they were "...working on tomorrow" for their release. UK Conoff, who also listened to the conference call, said Opukeme reported the captors were increasingly nervous and wanted to release the hostages to Bayelsa State government officials, but feared military reprisals.

11. (C) The SSG also said the State Security Service (SSS) was working with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to negotiate with the kidnappers, who do not want to deal with the federal government. NDDC Manager of Community and Rural Development, Patterson Ogon, confirmed NDDC involvement as a "regional intervention agency." (Comment: Ogon's claim is a bit fatuous as most people see the NDDC as an instrument of the federal government. End comment.)

FAMILY APPEALS UPDATE

12. (C) Scotland Yard is considering the efficacy of each hostage family drafting a letter appealing for the hostages' release, for delivery to the kidnappers.

UPDATE ON ALTERNATIVE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

13. (C) Ecodrill Country Manager Peter Quiatkowski spoke to one of his intermediaries, who confirmed the kidnappers have moved camp again, this time somewhere in Bayelsa along its border with Rivers State. The move apparently was precipitated by a military plane fly over of the prior location. The intermediary said the hostages were fine, but one, assumed to be Patrick Landry, was not as well as the others.

REPATRIATION PLAN UPDATE

14. (C) Shell reiterated standing airline reservations are in place for all four hostages and they are renewed daily. USG, HMG, and industry group are also addressing remaining gaps in repatriation planning in the case the hostages are not released in Bayelsa State (in Delta State, for example).

MILITARY UPDATE

15. (C) No military action appears imminent however reports of deployment of additional troops to the Delta area are reaching the kidnappers and appear to be affecting their resolve.

COMMENT

16. (C) The late Friday news is an optimistic sign, and we hope Dr. Igali is not being manipulated by the kidnappers. We have previously heard other optimistic forecasts which did not come true. However, this time we are seeing signs that the GON negotiating team, spearheaded by Dr. Igali, is in continuous contact with the kidnappers. The prudent course is to rely on that mechanism in hopes that the release of the hostages is imminent. However, we will also continue to investigate additional sources of information and lines of communication to effect the hostages' release just in case their release not effectuated tonight. End comment.

BROWNE